

Backgrounder - 2017 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver

- The 2017 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver took place throughout the region over a 24-hour period between March 7 and 8, 2017.
- The Homeless Count represents a conservative point-in-time snapshot of homelessness on a particular night in Metro Vancouver.
- Metro Vancouver 2017 Homeless Count was conducted in the following communities:
 - Burnaby
 - Delta
 - Langley (City and Township)
 - New Westminister
 - North Shore (City and District of North Vancouver and West Vancouver)
 - Richmond
 - Ridge Meadows (Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows)
 - Surrey
 - Tri-Cities (Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody)
 - Vancouver
 - White Rock
- The Fraser Valley Regional District also conducted a homeless count on March 8.
- BC Non-Profit Housing Association, in partnership with M. Thomson Consulting, carried out the Homeless Count on behalf of Metro Vancouver as the regional “Community Entity” by organizing volunteers, community partnerships and logistics.
- The count is funded in part by the Government of Canada’s Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS).
- Funding and in-kind support is also provided by:
 - Lu’ma Native Housing Society
 - City of Vancouver
 - Vancouver Foundation
 - Real Estate Foundation of BC
 - Surrey Homelessness & Housing Society
 - Port of Vancouver
 - Service Canada
 - Metro Vancouver
 - Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee
 - Vancity
 - Community Voicemail
 - M. Thomson Consulting
 - BC Non-Profit Housing Association
 - InFocus
 - Transit Police
 - City of New Westminister
 - Community Homelessness Tables

2017 Count Highlights:

- The 2017 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver found 3,605 people homeless in the region, up 30% from the previous count in 2014.
- Aboriginal people continue to make up a significant portion of the total homeless population. This year's count identified 747 Aboriginal people who were homeless, compared to 582 in 2014.
- For 2017, count organizers tested new approaches in order to better capture the extent and diversity of homelessness throughout the region, including sending teams of volunteers out on boats to trawl local waterways to find people living aboard derelict vessels, giving more attention to rural areas, and returning on three consecutive days to survey the homeless population in the Surrey-Newton area.
- Of the 3,605 homeless individuals, 1,032 were considered "sheltered homeless," meaning they were found in shelters, safe houses for youth or transition houses for women. This category also includes individuals with "no fixed address" staying temporarily in hospital beds, jails or detox facilities. Among those, 256 individuals were found in Extreme Weather Response (EWR) shelters.
- The count found a total of 378 youth under 25, including 199 children under 19 years of age, 117 of whom were accompanied by their parents. Young people represented 16% of the homeless population in 2017 compared to 20% in 2014, making them the only age group where the count results showed a decrease compared to 2014.
- A total of 556 seniors (55 and older) were counted as homeless, compared to 371 in 2014. Seniors represented 23% of the homeless population compared to 18% in 2014. This continues the upward trend of seniors as a growing portion of the homeless population that has been evident since 2008.
- The survey also found 607 people who identified as female. Females represent 27% of the homeless population in 2017, which is the same share as in 2014. Twenty-five individuals identified as a non-binary gender, representing 1% of the homeless population.
- A final report on the 2017 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver, with detailed analysis of demographics and long term trends, will be released in the summer.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the purpose of the Homeless Count?

- To estimate the number of people who are homeless in Metro Vancouver
- To obtain a demographic profile of the homeless population
- To identify trends compared to previous Homeless Counts
- To obtain data that will help determine future policies and services

Who is included in the Homeless Count?

- A person who does not have a place of their own where they pay rent and where they could expect to stay for more than 30 days
- No physical shelter, staying outside (i.e. alleys, parkades, parks, vehicles)
- Emergency shelters
- No Fixed Address and staying temporarily in a hospital, jail or detox
- Staying temporarily at someone's place (couch surfing)
- People staying in derelict vessels on waterways

Why do people become homeless?

People become homeless for a variety of reasons, but the high cost and low availability of housing are major contributing factors. The top factors in the 2014 Homeless Count, according to survey participants, included:

- Low income (47%)
- High rents (42%)
- Addiction (27%)
- No income (21%)

How is the Homeless Count conducted?

The Homeless Count involves a brief anonymous survey with people who self-identify as being homeless. More than 20 area coordinators with the support of their local Community Homelessness Tables, almost 1,200 volunteers and staff from partner organizations were involved in 2017.

Preparation for the 2017 count included mapping locations, connecting with local service providers, refining and revising the survey, and developing new research methodologies for expanding the scope of the count.

On March 7 and 8, volunteers were sent out in teams of two to visit shelters and known spots where people who may be homeless are located to conduct surveys. Volunteer shifts are 2 to 3 hours long and all volunteers are trained on the purpose of the Count, the survey and how to stay safe when out on the streets.

Who oversees the methodology of the Homeless Count?

The methods and implementation of the Count are overseen by a project team brought together by Metro Vancouver, the HPS Designated Community Entity. It includes these stakeholders: the Metro Vancouver and Aboriginal HPS Community Advisory Board, and Entities of the Metro Vancouver region, Community Homelessness Tables, municipalities, the Aboriginal community, past Count consultants, Service Canada and various service agencies.

How accurate are Homeless Counts?

The Count represents a conservative, point-in-time snapshot of people who are homeless on a given day in Metro Vancouver. Many more people experience homelessness in a year than can be counted on any given day. Over the course of a year, some people will become homeless for the first time, some will exit homelessness, and others will cycle in and out of homelessness.

The Count may underestimate the number of people who are actually homeless, particularly those who are “couch surfing” with friends and family, such as women and children, youth and Aboriginals.

Through the Count, communities can also connect homeless individuals with housing and support. Work is consistently being done to make the Counts more accurate. This year, Metro Vancouver expanded the coverage to rural and remote areas, as well as waterways, and implemented an enhanced methodology to survey individuals in the Newton, Surrey area over a three-day period.

How is this information from the Homeless Count used?

Service providers, planners, community groups, health authorities, municipalities and funders use information from the Homeless Counts to assist in policy development, planning, and prioritizing programs and services to address the needs of people who are homeless.

How long have Homeless Counts been taking place in Metro Vancouver?

Since 2002, Homeless Counts have taken place across Metro Vancouver every three years – 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014 and 2017.

What is new for the 2017 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver?

Waterways: for the first time in Canada, this Homeless Count covered waterways so that we can better understand the housing needs of people on derelict vessels.

Surrey Extended Urban Strategy: The Count team tested an extended survey in Surrey’s downtown core over a three day period, which we hope will help us understand the size of the previously under-counted population.

Joint count with Fraser Valley Regional District: FVRD held a joint count on the same day to provide a larger coverage area.

Where can I get the results of the 2017 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver?

The Preliminary Data Report, released April 10, 2017, is available on www.metrovancouver.org. A final report, with detailed analysis of demographics and long term trends, will be released in the summer.